

Forthcoming Special Issue Tributes to Thandika Mkandawire

Thandika Mkandawire: Tribute to a Mentor and Game-changer

The passing of Thandika Mkandawire in the morning of 27 March 2020 has been a significant body blow to many of us. Thandika, as he preferred you call him regardless of the age difference, was laid to rest on 15 April 2020. It is still immensely difficult to reconcile oneself with the idea that he would no longer walk among us, enthuse us with his infectious humour, and distil in his gentle manner incredible insights from his well of knowledge and wisdom. A lot may be said about the brilliance of his mind, and his sense of humour. What strikes me most about Thandika is how much he taught us, by his very life, what it means to be human. Thandika had a zest for life and boundless energy that put some of us, many years his junior, to shame. Thandika was remarkably generous and deeply caring. Above all, Thandika was a person of stellar personal integrity. I knew him as a mentor and a game-changer, and it is in this personal sense that I would like to present this tribute in his memory.¹

Three people have been immensely influential in shaping my analytical sensibilities and career. The first two are Omafume Onoge and John Ohiorhenuan, who were

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influential in shaping my thoughts in my undergraduate and graduate studies and early career. Thandika Mkandawire was the third person. The three of them shared characteristics that endeared me to them: a deep disregard for dogmas, immense capacity for reasoning outside the box, and an unflinching commitment to Africa and its peoples. They were deeply internationalist, as well.

Initial Encounters

Encounters can be fleeting or enduring. In the case of Thandika, my encounter was both. It began at the inception workshop for the *Reflection on Development* fellowship programme held in Kampala, Uganda in 1989. Earlier that year, I had returned to Ibadan, Nigeria from a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. This was part of the African Perspectives on Development project to which Ulf Himmelstrand had invited me to participate as a contributing author.²

On my return from the July 1989 workshop in Nairobi, I walked into John Ohiorhenuan's office in the Department of Economics for a chat on my experience. As I was about to leave his office, Johnny asked if I had seen the call for application for the Rockefeller Foundation/CODESRIA Reflections on Development fellowship programme. Johnny was a laureate of the inaugural fellowship. I had not seen the announcement and had no idea what CODESRIA was. Having completed my doctoral studies the previous year, I did not think I could apply for such a prestigious fellowship. Johnny was unrelenting in asking me to apply. It took a week, but I eventually decided to apply, framed by outstanding research questions that arose from the paper I presented at the Nairobi workshop. As it turned out, I received a letter from CODESRIA that my application was successful. The letter was signed by a 'Thandika Mkandawire—Executive Secretary.' The inception workshop was hosted by Mahmood Mamdani's Centre for Basic Research and we stayed at the Nile Hotel in Kampala.

I had a more vivid recollection of Micere Mugo and Mahmood Mamdani, both as resource

In July 2006, he formally submitted a letter to the Registrar of the university indicating his desire to present himself for a Senior Doctorate in Development Studies through the Department of Sociology. Working with one of his staff at UNRISD, we put together the portfolio of his publications. I developed the motivation for his presentation for the degree. This was supported enthusiastically by colleagues in the Department of Sociology. The nomination sailed through the Faculty Board and Senate. A panel of five examiners, all top international scholars, was appointed for the portfolio of publications that Thandika submitted for the degree. Prof Sir Richard Jolly was one of the examiners. The rest, as they say, is history. The official graduation photograph of Thandika being hooded by the Registrar of the university at the degree award ceremony has hung on the wall of my home since 2007.

13. Cf. "Interview with Thandika Mkandawire upon his retirement" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXyEQz1Lfel> (20 Dec 2011).
14. Thandika Mkandawire, "Development planning and wage employment: a review of practice and issues in six eastern African countries", International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 1975.
15. Thandika Mkandawire, "Thinking about Developmental States in Africa", *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25(3): 289-313, 2001.
16. Thandika Mkandawire. "Running while others walk: Knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development (revised version of the paper delivered as Inaugural Lecture for Chair, African Development at the London School of Economics on April 27, 2010)", *Africa Development* 36(2): 1-36, 2011.
17. Thandika Mkandawire, "'Good governance': the itinerary of an idea", *Development in Practice* 17(4-5): 679-681, 2007, p.680.
18. Thandika Mkandawire, "Comments on Democracy and Political Instability", *Africa Development* 13(3): 77-82, 1988.
19. Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, "Political Instability and the Prospects for Democracy in Africa", *Africa Development* 13(1), 1988.
20. Thandika Mkandawire, "Disempowering new democracies and the persistence of poverty." In Max Spoor (ed.) *Globalisation, Poverty and Conflict A critical 'development' reader*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 117-153, 2004.
21. "Running while others walk", p.7
22. *Ibid*.
23. Interview with Thandika Mkandawire upon his retirement" op cit.
24. 'Diswelfare' is a concept used often by Richard Titmuss to refer to the adverse impact of social processes or phenomenon on human wellbeing ('welfare'); their negative welfare impact.